



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
Planning Department

Planning Glossary of Terms

Revised September 2003

Affordable Housing- Housing that is priced to be affordable to specific segments of the population- usually those with low and moderately-low incomes, who cannot afford market-created housing.

Assessment District- A financing district that requires property owners to pay based on the benefit each property receives from the construction of the public infrastructure.

Blight- A condition of deterioration of a site, structure, or area that may cause nearby buildings and/or areas to decline in attractiveness and/or utility. Under California redevelopment law, a blighted area must be predominantly urbanized, and the blight must cause both a physical and an economic burden to the community, as well as being conducive to ill health, transmission of disease, infant mortality, and juvenile delinquency.

Board of Zoning Appeals- Its main duties are to hear and determine appeals from the rulings, decisions and determinations of the Zoning Administrator, granting or denying applications for conditional use permits, or for other permits, or for variances from the zoning provisions of the Municipal Code or zoning ordinances. Three members of the Board shall constitute a quorum. The affirmative vote of not less than three members shall be necessary for any action of the Board. This board is appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council.

Buffer Zone- An area of land separating two distinct land uses that acts to soften or mitigate the effects of one land use on the other.

Build-out- Development of land to its full potential or theoretical capacity as permitted under current or proposed planning or zoning designations.

Bulk- The mass or volume of buildings.

Capital Improvements- The building of infrastructure or public works projects.

California Coastal Commission-The lead agency responsible for carrying out California's

federally-approved coastal management program. The Coastal Commission plans for and regulates land and water uses in the coastal zone consistent with policies of the Coastal Act.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)- A state law that (1) defines state environmental goals and the responsibilities of local governments to assist in achieving these goals; and (2) sets forth the requirements for the environmental analysis of proposed public and private projects, including the preparation and/or review of environmental impact reports or issuance of exemptions and negative declarations.

Capital Improvement Program (CIP)- A local government's schedule of infrastructure improvements necessary to accommodate existing and anticipated future development. Most such programs include a financing mechanism to fund the cost of the improvements.

Carrying Capacity- Used in determining the potential of an area to absorb development: (1) The level of land use, human activity, or development for a specific area that can be accommodated permanently without an irreversible change in the quality of air, water, land, or plant and animal habitats. (2) The upper limits of development beyond which the quality of human life, health, welfare, safety or community character within an area will be impaired; or (3) The maximum level of development allowable under current zoning.

Circulation Element-One of the seven state-mandated elements of a general plan, it identifies the general location and extent of existing and proposed major roads, transportation routes, terminals, and public utilities and facilities. It must be correlated with the land use element.

City of Villages Strategy-A proposed growth strategy being considered in the Strategic Framework Element that emphasizes mixed uses, community centers, and transit. This strategy is designed to draw upon the strengths of San Diego's neighborhoods, commercial centers, institutions, and employment centers. The strategy focuses on the long-term economic, environmental, and social health of our communities. The Village strategy is an attempt to consciously determine when and how new growth should occur, and to require that new facilities be in place as growth occurs, but is not linked to any particular rate of growth. The strategy reinforces the existing pattern of development by utilizing community nodes or centers for further intensification and enhancement.

(Please see regional center, subregional district, urban village center, neighborhood village center, and transit corridor for definitions of village categories.)

Coastal Development Permit (CDP)- Required for development in the Coastal Overlay Zone.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)- Federal funds which can be used to repair streets, improve infrastructure, and make other investments in what might be called public domain.

Community Facilities District (CFD)- A specific geographic area upon which is levied a special tax, approved by a two thirds vote of property owners, used to finance public facilities. CFD's

finance the public facilities through the sale of bonds. The bonds are repaid by increased property taxes which are the result of property improvements and the construction of the public facilities (tax increment financing). CFD's are also referred to as Mello-Roos, after the state legislators who sponsored the enabling legislation.

Community Plan-A public document which contains specific proposals for future land uses and public improvement in a given community.

Conditional Use Permit (CUP)- Required for the development of uses that may be desirable under appropriate circumstances, but are not permitted by right in the applicable zone. The purpose of the CUP process is to determine whether, and under what conditions, a specific use may be appropriate in a given location. Further, the intent is that each use be developed so as to fully protect the public health, safety, and welfare of the community. To provide this protection, conditions may be applied to address potential adverse effects associated with the proposed use.

Conservation- The management of natural resources to prevent waste, destruction or degradation.

Conservation Element-An element of the general plan that addresses the conservation, development, and use of natural resources, including water, forests, soils, rivers and mineral deposits.

Cost Reimbursement District (CRD)- Provides a mechanism whereby a developer may be reimbursed, by subsequent builders, for costs incurred in providing facilities which are over and above the original developer's fair share of the facility.

Council of Governments (COG)- An association of cities and counties that often acts as a regional planning agency with some power under state and federal law.

Design Review; Design Control- The comprehensive evaluation of a development and its impact on neighboring properties and the community as a whole, from the standpoint of site and landscape design, architecture, materials, colors, lighting, and signs, in accordance with a set of adopted criteria and standards. "Design Control" requires that certain specific things be done and that other things not be done. Design Control language is most often found within a zoning ordinance. "Design Review" usually refers to a system set up outside of the zoning ordinance, whereby projects are reviewed against certain standards and criteria by a specifically established design review board or committee.

Development Agreement- A contract between a city or county and a developer, which may specify conditions, terms, restrictions, and regulations pertaining to all aspects of a development.

Development Impact Fees (DIF)- These are collected within urbanized communities to mitigate the impact of new development through provision of a portion of the financing needed for identified public facilities and to maintain existing levels of service for that community.

Development Rights- The speculative value of property for real estate development. Many local land trusts and government agencies choose to buy the development rights of property they wish to protect from development rather than buying the land itself.

Direct Nexus- Legal term meaning a direct relationship or connection between an exaction and the project on which it is imposed.

Discretionary Approval- An approval by a decision-making body which has the legal discretion to approve or deny a project.

Discretionary Review- The process by which a decision-making body considers whether to approve or deny a project.

Element (in general plan)- A chapter or section of the local general plan which addresses a specific topic and sets forth public policies and programs pertaining to that topic. California Planning Law mandates that each city and county prepare and adopt a general plan containing at least seven specified elements (land use, circulation, open space, conservation, noise, safety, and housing).

Enterprise Zone- An area designated by the federal or state government as a distressed area where regulatory and tax burdens are loosened to stimulate private investment.

Environmental Impact Report (EIR)- A detailed informational document prepared by the public agency responsible for carrying out a project as part of the CEQA process that describes and analyzes a project's significant environmental effects and discusses ways to mitigate or avoid those effects.

Exaction- A contribution or payment required as an authorized precondition for receiving a development permit. It usually refers to a mandatory dedication or fee in lieu of dedication requirements found in many subdivision regulations and may apply to land for parks or other public facilities.

Facilities Benefit Assessment (FBA)- Provides 100% of funds for public facilities projects which service a designated area of benefit, and are identified in the Public Facilities Financing Plan. The dollar amount of the assessment is based upon the cost of each public facility equitably distributed over a designated area of benefit in the community planning area. Liens are recorded with the County Assessor's Office.

Final Map- A map of an approved subdivision filed in the county recorder's office. It shows surveyed lot lines, street rights-of-way, easements, monuments, and distances, angles, and bearings, pertaining to the exact dimensions of all parcels, street lines, and so forth.

Financing Plan- A City Council approved document that identifies public facilities which serve

the community and which are required in order to comply with General Plan standards and the area community plan.

Fiscal Impact Analysis- A projection of the direct public costs and revenues resulting from population or employment change to the local jurisdiction(s) in which the change is taking place. Enables local governments to evaluate relative fiscal merits of general plans, specific plans, or projects.

Fiscal Impact Report (FIR)- A report projecting the public costs and revenues that will result from a proposed program or development.

Floor-Area Ratio (FAR)- A formula set by local ordinance that establishes the maximum permitted building volume as a multiple of the area of the lot.

Future Urbanizing Area (FUA)- One of the three “tiers” or phases of growth established by the growth management program of the 1979 Progress Guide and General Plan. This area is largely occupied by vacant land, located at or adjacent to the city boundaries, and zoned for agricultural use. Some of the land included in the Future Urbanizing category was located within the city’s boundaries, but was not subject to the city’s land use authority, such as Miramar Naval Air Station, Port District lands, including Lindbergh field, and East Otay Mesa in the county. The General Plan discouraged urban and suburban levels of development in the area, unless and until the Urbanized and Planned Urbanizing area were sufficiently built out pursuant to General Plan guidelines, Council Policies 28-30, and other specific plans and policies.

General Obligation Bond- A tax-exempt bond issued by a public agency that must be repaid from general tax revenues rather than from specific revenue sources.

General Plan- A compendium of city or county policies regarding its long-term development, in the form of maps and accompanying text. The General Plan is a legal document required of each local agency by the State of California Government Code Section 65301 and adopted by the City Council or Board of Supervisors. In California, the General Plan has 7 mandatory elements (Circulation, Conservation, Housing, Land Use, Noise, Open Space, Safety and Seismic Safety) and may include any number of optional elements (such as Air Quality, Economic Development, Hazardous Waste, and Parks and Recreation). The General Plan may also be called a “City Plan,” “Comprehensive Plan,” or “Master Plan.”

General Plan Amendment- A change or addition to a community’s general plan. General plans can be amended with relative ease up to four times a year.

Hearing Officer- Acts as the decision maker for permits, maps, and other matters in accordance with the decision-making procedures of the Land Development Code. The Hearing Officer shall preside at a public hearing and make an impartial decision on a permit, map, or other matter based on the application, written reports prepared prior to the hearing, and information received at the hearing. This position is appointed by the City Manager.

Historical Resources Board-An advisory board, consisting of fifteen members appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council. The Board is authorized by law to officially designate historical properties and to make recommendations on projects proposed for historically designated resources.

Historical Site-Any site, building, structure, district, or mark of historical significance due to its association with such things as noted past events, historical persons, or distinguishing architectural characteristics or a significant representation of an era in the development of a city.

Housing Commission-A group of people appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council who investigate the improve dwelling conditions in San Diego by reviewing and recommending revisions and actions, including recommendations on all matters before the Housing Authority. Additionally, the housing commission approves plans, specifications, agreements, expenditures, and other related matters.

Housing Element- One of the seven state-mandated elements of a local general plan, it assesses the existing and projected housing needs of all economic segments of the community, identifies potential sites adequate to provide the amount and kind of housing needed, and contains adopted goals, policies, and implementation programs for the preservation, improvement, and development of housing. Under State law, Housing Elements must be updated every five years.

Impact- The effect of any direct man-made actions or indirect repercussions of man-made actions on existing physical, social, or economic conditions.

Impact Fee- A fee, also called a development fee, levied on the developer of a project by a city, county or public agency as compensation for otherwise-unmitigated impacts the project will produce. California Government Code Section 66000 *et. seq.* specifies that development fees shall not exceed the estimated reasonable cost of providing the service for which the fee is charged. To lawfully impose a development fee, the public agency must verify its method of calculation and document proper restrictions of use of the fund.

Infill Development- Development of vacant land (usually individual lots or left-over properties) within areas that are already largely developed.

Infrastructure- Public services and facilities, such as sewage-disposal systems, water-supply system, other utility systems, and roads.

Initial Study- A preliminary analysis by a city of a proposed project to determine whether an environmental impact report (EIR) must be prepared or a negative declaration will be sufficient.

LAFCO (local agency formation commission)- A county commission that reviews and evaluates all proposals for formation of special districts, incorporation of cities, annexation to special districts or cities, consolidation of districts, and merger of districts with cities. Each county's

LAFCO is empowered to approve, disapprove, or conditionally approve these

Land Use Element- Designates the general location and intensity of housing, business, industry, open space, education, public buildings and grounds, waste disposal facilities and other land uses. Within the City of San Diego, the community plans serve as the land use element of the general plan.

Local Coastal Plan- A plan for coastal development required by the state Coastal Commission before land use permitting power in the coastal zone is returned to local governments.

Master EIR- A document used as the first step in environmental review for broad-based programs where a series of related actions may occur under one project. The Master EIR covers all of the potential environmental impacts that can be feasibly analyzed at the time the overall plan is designed.

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)- The regional agency in each region designated by the federal government to conduct transportation planning under federal law. The MPO is often, but not always, the COG.

Ministerial (Administrative) Decision- An action taken by a governmental agency that follows established procedures and rules and does not call for the exercise of judgment in deciding whether to approve a project.

Mitigated Negative Declaration- A CEQA document prepared when a project would have significant environmental effects as originally proposed, but the developer can and will eliminate those effects by changing the project or adopting mitigation measures, meaning that certain steps must be taken but no further environmental review is necessary.

Mitigation- Actions or project design features that reduce environmental impacts by avoiding adverse effects, minimizing adverse effects, or compensating for adverse effects.

Mixed-Use- Properties on which various uses, such as office, commercial, institutional, and residential, are combined in a single building or on a single site in an integrated development project with significant functional interrelationships and a coherent physical design. A “single site” may include contiguous properties.

MTDB-The Metropolitan Transit Development Board; the transit agency for metropolitan San Diego.

Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP)- A cooperative, long-term habitat conservation planning program for southwestern San Diego County, as authorized under the federal and California Endangered Species Acts and the California Natural Communities Conservation Planning Act. The MSCP is designed to preserve an interconnected system of viable native habitat for the protection of multiple sensitive species by identifying priority conservation areas,

Multiple-Habitat Planning Areas (MHPA), where development will be restricted and areas outside the MHPA where future development will be directed. The City of San Diego has been implementing its portion of the MSCP since 1997.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)- A federal law very similar to CEQA which requires its own environmental review process.

Neighborhood Development Permit (NDP)- Required for uses that have the potential for limited physical impacts on surrounding property.

Neighborhood Use Permit (NUP)- Required for developments that propose new uses, changes to existing uses, or expansions of existing uses, and that could have limited and identifiable impacts on surrounding development within an immediate area.

Neighborhood Village Center-A specific land use category of the City of Villages strategy. Neighborhood village centers range in size from 5 to 160 acres, and support medium to medium-high densities in a variety of building types. They include neighborhood shopping and services, and could include an employment component. Public or civic space is required. Residential densities vary according to each center's size, location, surrounding community character, and availability of public facilities, particularly transit.

New Urbanism- A movement in architecture, planning, and urban design that emphasizes a particular set of design principles, including pedestrian- and transit-oriented neighborhood design, and a mix of land uses as a means of creating more cohesive communities.

NIMBY- "Not in my backyard" Refers to the attitude of residents and homeowners who oppose new development simply because it would be located close to them.

Noise Element-One of the seven state-mandated elements of a local general plan, it identifies and appraises noise problems and sounds within the affecting the community, and forms the basis for distributing new noise-sensitive land uses.

Open Space Element- One of the seven state-mandated elements of a local general plan, it contains an inventory of privately and publicly owned open-space lands, and adopted goals, policies, and implementation programs for the preservation, protection, and management of open space lands.

Overlay- A land use designation on the Land Use Map, or a zoning designation on a zoning map, that modifies the basic underlying designation in some specific manner.

Parcel Map- A map depicting the establishment of up to four new lots by splitting a recorded lot. Parcel maps are subject to the California Subdivision Map Act and a city's subdivision regulations.

Park and Recreation Board-A board appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council, who advises the Council through the City Manager on public policy matters relating to the acquisition, development, maintenance, and operation of parks, beaches, playgrounds, and recreational activities.

Planned Community- A large-scale development whose essential features are a definable boundary; a consistent, but not necessarily uniform, character; overall control during the development process by a single development entity; private ownership of recreation amenities; and enforcement of covenants, conditions, and restrictions by a master community association.

Planned Development Permit (PDP)- An optional permit process that allows flexibility in the application of development regulations in exchange for imaginative and innovative design.

Planned District- a legally described geographic area (1) which has historical significance or serves as an established neighborhood or community; or (2) which is at the time of adoption developing or substantially undeveloped and for which a program of phased growth is desirable; and (3) which has been designated a Planned District by City Council.

Planned District Ordinance (PDO)-The ordinance which includes the zoning for a planned district (see above definition for planned district).

Planned-Unit Development- A self-contained development often with a mixture of housing types and densities, in which the subdivision and zoning controls are applied to the project as a whole rather than to individual lots, as in most subdivisions. Densities and lot sizes are calculated for the entire development, usually permitting a trade-off between the clustering of houses and provision of common open space or other amenities.

Planned Urbanizing Area (PUA)- One of the three “tiers” or phases of growth established by the growth management program of the 1979 Progress Guide and General Plan. This area is comprised of newly developing communities primarily along the I-5 and I-15 corridors. Development in this area could occur, but only in accordance with an adopted community or specific plan. The General Plan and several Council Policies also required Planned Urbanizing area applicants to pay for the construction of all necessary public facilities through either a Facilities Benefit Assessment or other financing mechanism.

Planning- The process by which public agencies, mostly local governments, determine the intensity and geographical arrangements of various land uses in a community.

Planning Area- The area directly addressed by the general plan. A city’s planning area typically encompasses the city limits and potentially annexable land within its sphere of influence.

Planning Commission- A body, usually having five or seven members, created by a city or county in compliance with California law (Section 65100) that requires the assignment of the planning functions of the city or county to a planning department, planning commission, hearing

officers, and/or the legislative body itself, as deemed appropriate by the legislative body.

Police Power- The inherent right of a government to restrict an individual's conduct or use of his/her property in order to protect the health, safety, welfare, and morals of the community.

Port of San Diego-A special government entity, created in 1962 by an act of the California legislature in order to manage San Diego Harbor, operate Lindbergh Field, and administer public lands along San Diego Bay.

Progress Guide and General Plan- The City of San Diego's general plan.

Project Area Committee (PAC)- A group of residents, property owners, business owners, and community organizations in a redevelopment project area, who are consulted with on policy matters dealing with the planning and provision of replacement residential facilities, relocation, and other matters which effect residents of the project area. A PAC is required if redevelopment might involve the displacement of a substantial number of low- and moderate-income persons and families.

Redevelopment- The legally-authorized process of rehabilitating or rebuilding a deteriorated section of a city using municipal powers and finances to assemble properties, replace infrastructure, or otherwise assist in creating new facilities and stimulating private development.

Regional Center-A specific land use category of the City of Villages strategy. The regional center is the administrative, business, cultural, and institutional center of the region. Centre City serves as the regional center.

Safety Element-One of the seven state-mandated elements of the general plan, it establishes the policies and programs to protect the community from risks associated with seismic, geologic, flood, and wildfire hazards.

SANDAG- San Diego Association of Governments; San Diego's council of government

Site Development Permit (SDP)- Required for developments that, because of their location, size, or some other characteristic, may have significant impacts on resources or on the surrounding area.

Site Planning- The physical layout of building and landscape design.

Specific Plan- A special set of development standards that apply to a particular geographical area.

Sphere of Influence- The probable ultimate physical boundaries and service area of a city as determined by the local agency formation commission (LAFCO) of each county.

Strategic Framework Element-A new chapter of the City's Progress Guide and General Plan, replacing the Guidelines for Future Development. It provides a long-term strategy for growth, development, and quality of life. The Strategic Framework Element is based upon a vision and core values developed by a forty-member citizen committee.

Subdivision- The division of a tract of land into defined lots, either improved or unimproved, which can be separately conveyed by sale or lease, and which can be altered or developed.

Subregional District-A specific land use category of the City of Villages strategy. A subregional district is an area sometimes comprising an entire community plan area which is a major commercial, employment, and residential area. In all subregional districts, there is a permitted increase in employment intensity.

Supplemental EIR- A CEQA document that is prepared after a final EIR if there are minor changes to the project.

Sustainability- Community use of natural resources in a way that does not jeopardize the ability of future generations to live and prosper.

Sustainable Development- Development that maintains or enhances economic opportunity and community well-being while protecting and restoring the natural environment upon which people and economies depend. Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Tax-Increment Financing District- A special district created from a redevelopment area in which the future growth in property tax revenues generated is used to finance the redevelopment program itself. In most cases, redevelopment agencies issue bonds against this property tax increment to pay for public investments inside the redevelopment area.

Tentative Map- The initial map setting forth in detail a proposed land subdivision, which must comply with the city's or county's subdivision and zoning regulations and the state Subdivision Map Act. The subdivision of land depicted on the tentative map does not take effect until approval and recordation of the Final Map.

Topography- Configuration of a surface, including its relief and the position of natural and man-made features.

Transit Corridors-A specific land use category of the City of Villages Strategy. Corridors are lively, vital, pedestrian-friendly linkages between village centers. Corridors have a "main street" feel, and are home to a rich variety of small businesses and restaurants. They will permit a higher intensity of mixed use, residential/commercial development, or multiple uses which retain commercial uses or convert to higher density residential development. Corridors will be characterized by a high level of transit service and a variety of streetscape improvements.

Transit-Oriented Development-A compact land use pattern with housing, public parks and

plazas, jobs, and services located along key points on a transit system. The TOD concept provides the community with an approach to create a desirable and more efficient urban form while addressing the issues of traffic congestion, air quality, neighborhood character, and growth management.

Undevelopable- Specific areas where topographic, geologic, and/or surficial soil conditions indicate a significant danger to future occupants and a liability to the City or County are designated as “undevelopable” by the City or County.

Urban Open Space- The absence of buildings or development, usually in well-defined volumes, within an urban environment.

Urban Sprawl- Haphazard growth or outward extension of a city resulting from uncontrolled or poorly managed development.

Urban Storm Water Runoff- The water that flows into any general drainage system, rather than water that flows into a creek, stream, lake, or the ocean from a pipe.

Urban Village Center-A specific land use category of the City of Villages strategy. Urban village centers are targeted areas within subregional districts, characterized by high employment and commercial intensity with added medium to high density residential. They include a mix of employment uses, intensive residential development, and regional commercial uses.

Urbanized Area (UA)- One of the three “tiers” or phases of growth established by the growth management program of the 1979 Progress Guide and General Plan. This area is comprised of established, built-out neighborhoods (most of the land south of Miramar Naval Air Station with the exception of Tierrasanta, East Elliott and Otay Mesa) and the downtown core, where intensive and varied development has been encouraged.

Variance- A departure from any provision of the zoning requirements for a specific parcel, except use, without changing the zoning ordinance or the underlying zoning of the parcel. A variance usually is granted only upon demonstration of hardship based on the peculiarity of the property in relation to other properties in the same zone district.

Village-Defined by the City of Villages Strategy as a community-oriented center where residential, commercial, employment, and civic/educational uses are integrated. Villages are intended to be unique to the community, pedestrian-friendly, and have elements to promote neighborhood or civic gatherings. The land use mix includes public spaces and a variety of housing types and densities. Villages would require excellent transit service and public facilities to meet community needs.

(Please see regional center, subregional district, urban village center, neighborhood village center, and transit corridor for definitions of village categories.)

Wetlands- Transitional areas between terrestrial and aquatic systems where the water table is usually at or near the surface, or the land is covered by shallow water. Under a “unified” methodology now used by all federal agencies, wetlands are defined as “those areas meeting certain criteria for hydrology, vegetation, and soils.”

Zoning-A legislative means of ensuring that land uses of a community are properly situated in relation to one another in accordance with adopted plans.

Zoning Envelope- The space in which a project may be built on a piece of land, which is defined by specifying setbacks, height limits, and sometimes limits on the percentage of a site that may be covered by buildings, other structures, and paving.

Zoning Map- Government Code Section 65851 permits a legislative body to divide a county, a city, or portions thereof, into zones of the number, shape, and area it deems best suited to carry out the purposes of the zoning ordinance. These zones are delineated on a map or maps, called the Zoning Map.

Zoning Ordinance- A law dividing all land in the city into zones that specifies uses permitted and standards required in each zone.